



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

NUMBER:
FOR RELEASE:
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov>

06-31
IMMEDIATE

DATE: April 25, 2006
CONTACT: Ken August
or Michelle Mussuto
(916) 440-7660

WATER AND WARM WEATHER MEAN MORE MOSQUITOES AND WEST NILE VIRUS, STATE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER WARNS

SACRAMENTO – Heavy rain and warm weather are perfect ingredients for breeding mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus (WNV), State Public Health Officer Dr. Mark Horton warned today.

“While no predictions can be made on the severity of West Nile virus this season, record rainfall this spring has saturated yards to create perfect breeding grounds for mosquitoes,” Horton said. “Californians need to take precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites by eliminating all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding and applying insect repellent containing DEET.”

Horton encouraged the public to remain vigilant and “fight the bite” during an event at the State Capitol to mark WNV Awareness Week, April 24 to 30. WNV was first detected in California four years ago. So far this year, WNV has been detected in 12 birds in Orange, Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Clara and Ventura counties.

In 2005, a total of 935 human WNV infections, including 19 deaths, were reported in the 54 counties that detected WNV activity. Of the 456 horses that also tested positive for WNV, 200 died or were euthanized.

WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Health officials emphasized that the risk of serious illness to humans is low. Most individuals who are infected with WNV will not experience any illness. However, elderly individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk for serious illness. Individuals with diabetes or hypertension also appear to be more prone to develop more serious complications from WNV, according to research by CDHS’ Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory.

Last year, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger included \$12 million in the state budget to supplement the resources of existing mosquito control programs statewide and to expand efforts in areas of the state currently not covered to combat WNV. That investment in equipment and other products to control mosquitoes continues to benefit mosquito control efforts this year.

-more-

The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) will continue to use a sophisticated geographic information system it began using last year to track regions at elevated risk for WNV. The system is able to produce detailed color maps that identify the locations of birds that succumbed to WNV and indicate with a high degree of accuracy the areas where human WNV illnesses are more likely to occur. The system is determining the areas for enhanced surveillance and control efforts by local agencies.

Horton recommended four simple ways for individuals to protect themselves from WNV:

- Eliminate all standing water buckets, flowerpots, old tires, gutters and other sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding.
- Wear DEET, the most effective insect repellent, picaradin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants if you're going to be out at dawn or dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Make sure all window screens in the home are in good repair and functional.

Californians are encouraged to report dead birds by calling toll-free 1-877-WNV-BIRD (1-877-968-2473) or logging on to www.westnile.ca.gov.